

We Blazed the Trail to Onion Peak

This was the legend chalked on an auto truck that conveyed merry members of the Angora Hiking Club from Astoria, Oregon, to the foot of Onion Peak mountain which lies in a south-westerly direction, about forty-four miles distant.

The night was brightened by moon and stars, and to the right we could see Onion Peak. From below to two-thirds up, it was covered with a forest but the upper third of the mountain was nothing but a rock wall and rocky cliffs set in a frame of timber. These trees grew up the mountain side around and over above the rock pinnacle. The low hanging clouds drifted slowly over and around the peak. Moon, stars and dark blue sky contrasted pleasantly with the dark green forest, the green brown rocks, and silver fringed clouds.

It was 12 o'clock mid-night when we arrived at our camping place at Coal Creek bridge three miles from Nehalem City. Here we established our base camp in a meadow along side a small tide stream bordered with small alders. Immediately back and in the meadow itself were Evergreen Oregon blackberry bushes just in full bearing. By the aid of moonlight the camp fire was soon started, camp was made, and all were soon slumbering and dreaming of tomor-

row. The place itself was an ideal camping site.

At five in the morning an alarm clock and the Chief Guide awakened everyone. Breakfast was prepared and consumed.

Exactly at 6 A. M., September 14, 1924, the caravan started over a logging railroad right-of-way toward the mountain in a northwesterly direction. The moon which in the early night had been in the east was as yet in the heavens toward the west. The weather was exceptionally promising. In fact, on account of a clear sky, it was likely to be a warm day.

Travelling upon a railroad grade is not very strenuous, but rather tedious. We passed through low tideland, overgrown here and there with the ever present Oregon Evergreen blackberry bushes. It was pleasing to note that these blackberries were being made use of, as here and there were piles of berry boxes and signs prohibiting the unauthorized picking of the fruit. It showed that the owner of the land was harvesting the berries and sending them out to be canned and sent away into the market of the world as an Oregon product.

Presently the roadbed gradually went up hill. We passed a logging camp and soon were into more or less logged off land, passing over some

small bridges which spanned small mountain streams. These bridges were made of large logs, laid lengthwise over the stream. They surely were solid and strong. It was however a waste of timber to build them this way, but perhaps the cheapest in this country of abundance.

After travelling about three miles we arrived at the end of the road. Here a mass of extra large logs were piled criss cross. We descended over and through this mass to creek bottom where a donkey engine was stationed. This engine had hauled these logs out of the woods with the aid of a long steel cable.

Now our real mountain journey commenced. Going down the creek we went over rocks and through brush skirting the creek on our way up. Here is where Angoras Berry, Johnson, Erickson and Hustwick had on three previous occasions started to cut the trail free of underbrush so as to define the trail and direction more clearly.

Cutting a trail in the western Oregon underbrush is no small job. However, it must be remembered that the first cutting is invariably done in the rough. Many a tree, brush, root and rock is gone around or climbed over or under. It is a long step from virgin forest and jungle to a paved state highway. But these intrepid men deserve credit for what they have done.

They cut the brush here, stuck up a sign there, marked a tree on this side, also on the other side so as to note it on the return trip. They are blazing the trail for others to follow! Right here I want to say that all this was done without the aid of a surveying party and without the aid of a

compass. In fact a compass is of no use there due to local magnetic conditions. The job is well done and over the best possible route and grade.

Travelling in and along side a mountain stream is strenuous, but has its diversions. Here is a deep water hole that looks inviting to a mountain trout fisherman, but is very dangerous to a traveler. At one place especially a sort of a sandstone formation was the riverbed. From the action of running, tumbling water, large, long rifts and holes had worn away the softer part of this sandstone.

A mile's travelling brought us to a gorge in this stream which was piled high with tree trunks over which the travelling was difficult. A little farther up large boulders from the size of large dry goods boxes to the size of small houses obstructed the way. Here the water was rushing and tumbling under and around these blocks of rock. This gorge was picturesque, wild and yet inviting. A sign placed here by the blazing party bore the legend: "Angora Trail to Onion Peak, 50 Feet Up."

We climbed 50 feet up over boulders and up a canyon wall only to find that it took several jumps of 50 feet to make an impression as to height! I rather incline to believe they forgot to add another 0 and that it should have read "500 Feet Up."

Anyway, at that height a tolerable trail was found, also previously brushed out and blazed, leading steadily up. We were traveling up the ravine of Coal Creek.

It is called Coal Creek because coal of uncertain quantity and quality is found somewhere on this stream, the

sandstone formation indicating its presence and also that of gas.

We did not notice any excessive heat as we traveled continually in the shade of brush and large giant trees; also the altitude increased slowly by each step as it went almost continually up. Only here and there for small distances the trail went down some small ravine. The trees were of the fir, spruce, hemlock and cedar variety with cedar seemingly predominating; the writer never saw a better showing of cedar.

The creek branched here; we took the left fork. Here we stopped for water and filled our canteens. Another and last watering place was to be met with a mile or so distant.

Signs of game were abundant. This locality seemed to be a good camping ground for game—as well as for hunters. Written on one of the trail signs was the legend: "C. S. Briggs, B. L. Reese, A. R. Tohl—8-30-24, Going Home With One Big Buck."

On another sign we read as follows: "Two Days Later Chic Trombly, L. K. Christian, Buck Hill, Chas. Burmester Going Home with One, 9-1-24."

A picture of the buck carved into the wood denoted a four pointer, that is four on each horn, four years old.

This region is a very paradise for game. Evidence of their presence were many, as conditions were ideal. Away from civilization, plenty of feed in the form of brush, grass, etc., a sheltering mountain wall excluding the cold north winds—a sloping mountain facing the warm south sun. Here and there one could see where the deer and elk had rubbed their horns on cedar trees. These animals shed and grow new horns every year.

In the first stage of growth they are simply soft blood vessels protruding out of the head covered with skin and hair which is called velvet. Gradually but rapidly these grow and get harder. When almost hard the velvet seems to itch and peel off, and to relieve and hasten this process the animal rubs the horns against anything accessible, especially trees. The bark of cedar trees being softer than that of others, seems to be the favorite.

The presence of bear was also noted by smell! Bears leave an odor of a pig sty that is very pronounced. Cougars and wild cats also abound in considerable numbers. Near the top a small brown animal was seen, with the shape and size of a beaver. It soon ran under cover, however.

We now traveled around a hill toward the left so as to avoid the top of an intervening hill, and here we struck the end of the blazed trail. All went to work with a will. Four small axes and that many men formed the advance guard, and those who followed broke brush with their hands.

Travelling was now slower than before, but by a system of one blazing one one side and another on the other side of the tree—one cutting brush, etc.—progress was maintained. This trail breaking in a rough way soon brought us to a more open country.

Arriving at our last watering place we found to our dismay that on account of an unusually dry summer this creek had completely dried up. Not a drop in sight, nor would any digging in the rocks and earth help matters.

We had left our lunch at the creek junction intending to lunch there on

the return trip. Some had a little water left in their canteens, and with this we traveled farther and higher. The experienced mountaineer can do without water until camp is reached. The inexperienced were supplied from what was left. In this way all was managed well and no one suffered.

Right here it may be mentioned that it is not advisable to drink during the hike or during ascent—it is weakening—and by training yourself you can do without water much to your well being and comfort. This may sound odd to some but it is never-the-less a fact. Perspiration is thus reduced to a minimum. When in camp fill up—not to excess—but moderately. The next day you will feel a desire to drink. It seems the pores of the body need replenishing.

Keeping on travelling up higher—and steeper, over virgin territory save the presence of early government surveyors and timbermen, we soon came across a surveyor's stake. On it was carved "T 4 NR 10 W". On the four sides in that many direction "S 22, S 23, S 26, S 27." Nearby on a small hemlock was carved "Elevation 8-17-1917, 1899 feet. A large cedar was the "witness tree." A witness tree is one near the stake so that when the stake should rot or be missing the tree is as yet in evidence.

Just a few feet farther up hill was another tree on which was carved "Elevation 1900 feet." This was evidently marked by another party and agreed very well with the other measurement.

The trail commenced to get very steep. The trees were smaller and there was less underbrush. Here we encountered the first noble fir and

genuine Larch trees. Soon we beheld the upper, rocky part of the mountain before us. It looked like an impenetrable wall; a large lump of rock rising solidly out of the earth, overhanging in places.

I have stated before that looking from below this rocky part was about one-third of the upper section of the mountain. This seemed to about agree with the elevation noted near the surveyor's stake. In other words the mountain being over 3000 feet high, this upper crag would measure about 1000 feet.

We were all more or less exhausted by now. One thousand feet of rock wall is a formidable barrier—but the spirit of mountaineering will overcome everything. Doubts arose in the minds of some as to further progress. Water was lacking, and the hot sun was beating against the stone wall.

It seemed from below as if the mountain rose still higher than this wall on account of the trees growing all around the rocky cliff to the north, making it look as though another plateau commenced from the crest. However, the leaders Berry, Granlund and Johnson never wavered, they never doubted. They seemed to have an inborn confidence that laughs at obstacles. The greater the hindrance the greater the push — the will. Johnson and Granlund reconnoitered for an opening in the wall. Berry, like a cool headed leader headed the main party.

Slowly and steadily we forged ahead in a rift, a crack in the wall. Johnson had reported another opening as not passible, and he had reported that to go around to the left was entirely too great a distance. Up

we went. It looked as yet that this crack in the wall might lead us to an insurmountable barrier. Snake-like we wended through cracks and holes in the rocks, here and there aided by those farther up or pushed by some below us.

The mountain cliff is composed of a sort of a hard conglomeration with hard, sharp rocks protruding here and there. The action of the water and frost had removed all loose material.

The protruding rocks were solid—an inch projection gave enough for a foothold—and inch and a half enough for a hand hold. Like a snake would lift itself from shelf to shelf, working with hands, feet, shoulders, legs and knees, we passed through a sort of a chimney, the same as at Saddle Mountain, excepting not so high, but much narrower. A large boulder just above had to be avoided by cringing away down and wriggling past, so as not to loosen it—with possibly fatal results. On we climbed in genuine mountaineer fashion. We were up against the real thing.

Now commenced the monkey part of the climbing. Over a grassy and brushy part we were wriggling, lying flat on our stomachs at times to get past an abyss over a sort of a shelf. Some quavered, some wavered—but of no avail the top was in sight and up we must go. The spirit and determination was in some and the others soon felt themselves innoculated—it was catching.

The more determined forged ahead—the worst was conquered—and some rested. A shout from above soon told that the summit had been reached—and the news stimulated the

rest. Up a short steep part which was negotiated in zig-zag fashion, and we were on the summit.

In the following order they answered roll call on the very top: Ami Lagus, Lavern Shatto, Esther Juntti, Frances Wedekind, Tom Thomason, R. B. Seymour, Myrtle Trogen, Agnes Carlson, E. B. Hauke, Mrs. E. Granlund, Peggy Thomason, H. W. Carlson, Rear Guards, Chas. Johnson and Emil Granlund, Chief Guide John Berry and the Historian August Hildebrand.

One was missing, and just at this time Walter Stokes hove in sight below with a smile, making No. 17. He had sought temporary relief from the hot sun under a cool, shady cliff near the summit. A mighty shout went up—all were glad. The final triumph makes one forget the hardships gone through.

Sure, we were tired; some more or less. Some had felt the lack of water. Just at this time the wise forethought of the Chief Guide showed itself. Lunch had been left at the Junction of the creek to be consumed on our return trip. It was one o'clock, past noon. Everyone felt tired, hungry and thirsty. He now produced out of his knapsack a loaf of bread and a can of sardines. Divided in the bunch, it gave a bite and a fish for every one. You should have noticed the effect—even the thirst was quenched by the operation of eating a little.

We often refer to the Bible in our accounts of our travels—there is nothing new in this world. The writer cannot refrain from thinking of the loaves of bread and fishes distributed on a certain occasion by our great Teacher.

We now had time to look around and inspect the surroundings. The top of the mountain is a sharp ridge, just broad enough so one could sit or lie on it comfortably. There is not enough room on top for a cabin or a house. It is, say, about sixty feet long, of irregular shape. A little loose soil and disintegrated rock covers the surface. In this soil wild onions take root and grow. From this it perhaps received its name. However wild onions may be found on nearly all the coast mountain peaks—they are not exclusively on Onion Peak. Wild onions are edible, but should be avoided by persons with delicate digestive organs and by persons in an exhausted condition. It is claimed by some that they are extremely dangerous when consumed when the body is in that state.

About twenty years ago a surveying party of four headed by surveyor P. E. Hickman was found dead in this region. This was in the middle of winter. No traces of violence or poison was found—but they had eaten wild onions. Perhaps their vitality was not strong enough to digest them. Others claim wild onions may be eaten any time—however not in excess!

To the north the tree tops came up to the height of the top crest, hiding the rock to the north. Here the rock drops or slants abruptly for about 15 or 20 feet and then a very steep mountain side covered with forest commences. Similar conditions prevail to the west and east, tho these are somewhat steeper and more rugged. To the south it is bare, solid rock perpendicular and overhanging. The valleys around the mountain are deep

and as yet covered with virgin timber such as grows on the Pacific Northwest. This timber is of a pleasing dark green color. The nearest mountain peaks are visibly lower. Unfortunately on account of the prevailing haze we did not get a distant view. However enough was in sight to impress in our minds the grandeur of this lump of rock.

The mountain is about 3500 feet high. To some this may not mean a great height as compared with the Cascade Peaks or Rocky Mountain heights. However it should be born in mind that this height is from tide or ocean level. Before one attempts the Cascade Peaks he is already in a high altitude, and the Rocky Mountain peaks start from still a higher level. Again the dense timber, the crevasses and gulches, the underbrush and fallen dead timber are greater obstacles in our coast mountains than elsewhere.

The possessors of cameras got busy. To the west a little lower than the top was a cluster of rocks in the form of sharp pinnacles. The outline of some of these formed a face. We guessed as to whose likeness, going from George Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, Bryant, etc., down the national fame line. It was finally settled that with the bushy pompadour La Follette was the man. This seemed not to please some, others were satisfied, but this is politics and has no business to enter into mountaineering.

All wrote their names on a piece of paper and this was put in a glass jar which was brought along for this purpose and the jar was then fastened to a tree on the summit.

At two o'clock all made ready for the return trip. From the very peak the descent was easily made in a zig zag course, the same as we went up. The next stage was the steep shelf that had to be negotiated. Certain parts of a mountain are easier ascended than descended, and this section was harder to go down than up. The leader was equal to the occasion; taking four of the best climbers he formed a sort of human chain over which the rest clambered, hanging on the best they could on grass, rocks, brush, roots and arms, legs and feet of the others. Everything went without haste, with deliberation and with caution. In this way the worst part was passed.

The next stage, the narrow rocky cliff and hole in the ravine was also slowly and surely negotiated. It was some time before all assembled at the lower end of the rock wall. Numbers were counted and all found to be present.

From here Mr. and Mrs. Granlund were detailed to make a more rapid descent than the main body of the hikers for the reason of starting a fire and preparing coffee at the forks of the creek, our selected mountain camp.

Steadily the main caravan moved down the mountain side through the brush over the blazed trail which had been traveled in the morning. A good two hours travel brought us within smelling distance of the prepared campfire. The aroma of burning cedar wood drifting through the forest told the tale. The labor of traveling became suddenly very light as we came closer to the camp.

The fragrance of boiling coffee quickened our pulse and at last with a glad heart and joyous feeling we greeted Emil and his good wife as our saviors. The coffee, the water and lunch never tasted better. It was about 4:30 o'clock and you may know by this how hungry we were!

We rested, lunched and drank about a half hour. An advance squad was again detailed to go to the base camp and prepare matters.

Traveling down the creek bottom over the big boulders and rocks again was easier than the up trip—and by the time we struck the logging engine and the logging railroad it was commencing to get dark. It was now a matter of easy, steady traveling over an easy down grade. The increasing darkness silhouetted forms of something or another against the sky or distant mountains. Conversation drifted to animals wild or matters spooky. Chas. Johnson was taking the lead with Berry seeing that everyone was accounted for in the rear. It was becoming darker all along and the moon was as yet below the mountains. Presently one young lady timidly advanced the suggestion that she felt afraid, etc, etc. The Historian ventured the opinion that Chas. Johnson could surely be depended upon as a good defender, and further, knowing the make up of Charles, he would bet on this opinion. This did not satisfy the timid feeling and a doubt remained.

We were now traveling over a railroad trestle over a mountain stream wrapt up in our thoughts. Conversation in the dark over a trestle, especially one that curved sharply to the left is somewhat difficult. When we

were about in the middle. Oh horrors, the headlight of an approaching engine seen ahead. Chas. Johnson kept his head, cool as a cucumber but quicker than a tiger he spoke and acted; "All of you quick to the rear and jump—I will try and head off the train." Away he went into the darkness, into the glaring of the headlight—and away we scampered the best we could to the rear. These were exciting moments!!

We saw the form of Charles frantically motioning in the glare of the headlight. We saw to the rear everyone running, tumbling and jumping. We were just in the act of jumping into oblivion ourselves when to everyone's relief the engine came to a halt. Johnson had seemingly accomplished a miracle, he had halted the train just at the bend.

Voices were now heard and explanations were in order. Slowly a hand car, on the front of which was fastened a miner's acetylene searchlight, pushed by Emil Granlund came to view. The tension and excitement was over. All clambered on. Some pushed and kept on going up grade so as to pick up the last stragglers behind us. We were then as yet about a mile from the base camp.

After all were seated on the hand car away we went, sailing down grade with someone managing the brake. It did not take long before we were in camp alongside a warm campfire. The diversion of a hand car ride was very

welcome as we were all heartily tired. The Historian was also pleased to see Chas. Johnson make good—well, we simply knew he would when occasion demanded it. It was now 8 o'clock, evening.

Evening meal was prepared and consumed. Camp was broken, bedding and utensils packed.

It was suggested by Granlund to do away with the seats on the truck, for everyone to sit on bedding, etc., in the bottom, the bed of the truck. This was a happy suggestion as sitting upright, high, without a backrest, and especially when tired, is rather awkward and uncomfortable. The moon was shining brightly. By 9 o'clock all were seated and our home journey started. The rocking of the auto soon had them all in a drowsy semi-sleeping condition. Futile attempts were made to sing. The seats and the auto were too comfortable for a tired gang.

Coming over the divide we soon struck Seaside fog and had more or less of it until the welcome lights of Astoria greeted us when we were on Young's Bay bridge. It was one o'clock, a. m., when we arrived home, happy in the thought that we had made another successful trip, this being the first organized climb of Onion Peak.

AUGUST HILDEBRAND,
Historian.
